

THE CHRONOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THOMAS MANN'S *DIE GESCHICHTEN JAAKOB'S*

by Ralph W. Ewton, Jr.

In *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* the story of Jacob's life is told in what appears to be a very confusing order. Although we first meet Jacob when he is 67 years old, the narrative soon turns back to the time of his flight after the stealing of the blessing at the age of 30 and then jumps forward to his meeting with Esau at the age of 55. The part (*Hauptstück*)¹ of the novel which follows, entitled "Die Geschichte Dinas," deals with events which follow this meeting and concerns Jacob between the ages of 55 and 59. Then there is a jump back to the time of Jacob's stealing of the blessing, and it is only from this point that, with the omission of the events already related, the story proceeds in straight chronological order.

At the time *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* was written such jumps back and forth in time were not without precedent in the history of the novel.² They were, however, almost completely unprecedented in the earlier works of Thomas Mann. Only twice before do we find comparable long departures from a strict chronological time scheme and in neither of these instances is the departure part of a complex series of flashbacks which might be compared to that found in the Jacob novel. In *Der Zauberberg* Hans Castorp's youth is described after we have already read of his arrival at the sanatorium³; and in the second chapter of *Der Tod in Venedig* there is a similar glance backward to survey Gustav Aschenbach's past.

The much more complicated departures from chronological order in the first of the Joseph novels have received little commentary. Those of Mann's critics who have dealt with the subject have failed to appreciate fully the significance of the novel's chronological structure. Nor have more general theoretical studies, in dealing with the subject of time in the novel, succeeded in providing a rationale applicable to *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*. The limitations of these theories, from the point of view of the present study, lie in their determined search for an order which predominates over chronological order.⁴

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Of Mann's critics, it is Rolf Schörken⁵ who has dealt at greatest length with the problem. He maintains that the chronological scheme is a device for the portrayal of the character, Jacob. Ferdinand Lion⁶ touched briefly on the problem and concluded that the time scheme is Biblical in character. Genevieve Bianquis⁷ has observed that in the novel time itself seems to flow like the sea, in currents and tides. Finally, Paul Altenberg⁸ has made the most suggestive statements to date about the time scheme, which he describes with the word "improvisation." This word suggests a subtle combination of free play and conscious purpose in the composition of the novel and it is such a combination that will here be explored. Later the work of these critics will be discussed and criticized in detail.

In his introduction to a reading from the Joseph novels in November 1928, Thomas Mann says of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*:

Die ganze Vor- und Vätergeschichte ist aufzunehmen, wenn nicht chronologisch, so doch erinnerungsweise, sprunghaft-assoziationsmäßig, und nur aus Vater Jaakobs Leben, vorläufig, werde ich Ihnen einiges mitteilen können: drei zusammenhängende Abschnitte, die von Jaakobs Flucht nach dem Segenbetrüge, vom Beth-el-Traum und dann, mit Übersprungung seines Aufenthaltes bei Laban, von der Wiederbegegnung mit Esau nach fünfundzwanzig Jahren erzählen (XI, 629).⁹

These words are important for their characterization of the sequence of events in the novel as "erinnerungsweise" and "sprunghaft-assoziationsmäßig." The first of these terms seems to refer to Jacob as he reflected on his past, but "assoziationsmäßig" is a more ambiguous term since the associations may be those of Jacob, those of Thomas Mann himself, or, seen from the position of the artist, of both at once.

Our first introduction to this movement by association from one subject is in the *Vorspiel*, which is the narrator's journey through time into the depths of the mythological past. This movement by association of the narrator¹⁰ prepares us for a similar movement of Jacob's reflections which begins in Part I. It will be instructive to follow for a way the chain of associations in this first part of the novel which is entitled "Am Brunnen." Although only minor chronological problems arise in this part of the novel, the many changes of subject illustrate the character of its development by association. We shall see, moreover, how the themes of Part I suggest that it is Joseph, rather than Jacob, who is to be the subject of the novel.

In the first two chapters of Part I, where we are introduced to Joseph by the well, the narrator follows his associations where they lead. As early as the second chapter they lead into the past which, however, is dealt with only in perspective. In discussing Joseph's beauty and the traditional lack of restraint among those who have described it for us, the narrator is reminded of a similar instance of self-deception some twenty years before when certain men were willing to pay fantastic prices to Jacob for quite

ordinary sheep. And as Joseph plays at moon worship in the same chapter, his words are full of similar allusions to the mythological past.

In the next chapter Jacob appears for the first time. He is an old man with the dignity belonging to his 67 years. In describing this dignity, the narrator is reminded of another aspect of Jacob's character, his timidity:

es hatte Stunden der Demütigung, der Flucht, der blassen Angst für ihn gegeben, Lebenslagen, in denen, obgleich sie für die Gnade durchscheinend gewesen waren, derjenige, der seine Liebe trug, sich ihn nur ungern vorstellte (IV, 70).

The pattern of humiliation followed by grace is an instance of the larger theme of death and resurrection. Although Jacob's timidity is elaborated upon later in the novel, it should be noted that in this instance the theme points as much to Joseph's future as to Jacob's past. This is strongly suggested by the fact that thoughts of Jacob's timidity lead by association to reflection on his fear that Joseph may fall into the well beside which he was standing. Humiliation by being cast into a well is at the heart of the death and resurrection theme which is the dominant pattern in Joseph's whole life.

Recollection of the last meeting of father and son leads to a discussion of the evening meal and other events earlier in the same evening, particularly the theological disputations with the man Jepshe. The transition to the recent past is skillfully made. Some of Jacob's sons were absent from the meal, tending flocks in the mountains overlooking Shechem. This leads to a short commentary on the similarities of Jacob's God and the deity worshipped by the people of this city. Thus the themes of the last meeting of Jacob and Joseph and of theology lead naturally back to the meal and the theological argument of Jacob and Jepshe. There is also a hint of the future here, for the absence of the brothers occasions Joseph's journey to Shechem which ends in his being thrown into the pit.

The associative movement of the narrative could easily be traced in detail through the first three parts of the novel. Perhaps at this point, however, this may be left to the reader while the more important themes are here surveyed only in outline.

Numerous reminders of Joseph's future follow the events discussed above. We learn that Jacob is afraid a lion of the desert may attack his son and we are soon introduced to the themes of Joseph's talebearing and his strife with his brothers and of Jacob's immoderate and capricious love for Joseph. Pointing both to the father's past and to the son's future are the themes of the wanton land to the south and myths of fratricide.

The many themes dealt with thus far are connected in a chain of thoughts which are either obviously those of the narrator or else arise from the conversation of Jacob and Joseph and from Jacob's reflections on this conversation. The same is true of the remaining themes of the first part of the novel: Jacob's terrifying vision of himself and Joseph in the roles of

Abraham and Isaac and his inability to play the role of Abraham by raising the knife to kill Joseph; Joseph's "virgin birth"; the double blessing; Joseph's prophetic dreams; and, finally, the "schönes Gespräch" of the chapter "Zwiegesang," which is a ritualistic recital of the historical and mythological heritage of Jacob and Joseph, to which Joseph, however, significantly added his experience with the well, a matter belonging not to the past but to his own future.

The treatment of many of these themes in the novel involves not only references to the past and hints of the future but also small excursions to a number of different points in time. These excursions are easily made once the associative movement of the narrative is established. The whole of the *Vorspiel* is, in fact, a movement through time wherever the narrator's associations lead. And in Part I Jacob's memories and associations are similarly free from the bonds of chronology. The mood of the novel is one in which strict chronology seems unimportant. Accordingly, it is no great surprise when the series of flashbacks which tell of Jacob's earlier years begins. Yet while these flashbacks fit in comfortably with the mood of the novel thus far, there is evidence to follow which suggests that they came about partially by accident. Mann seems to have been led by the narrator's reflections and Jacob's memories into territories he did not originally intend to explore, namely, the whole of Jacob's earlier life.

The reader of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* soon sees that the *Vorspiel* and Part I of the novel contain a wealth of material of a speculative and suggestive sort. In fact, this speculative matter overpowers the actual story so that the whole of Part I deals with only one evening in the lives of Joseph and Jacob, an evening in which, from a storyteller's point of view, very little happens. The reason for this is clear: the concentration of history, theology, and mythology here at the beginning forms an introduction to the story which is to be told. But what story is it to which all this is an introduction?

A study of the prelude and Part I of the novel does not reveal the course the story will take. We might expect it to go on with an account of Joseph after this evening by the well, and a look ahead to *Der junge Joseph* reveals that when his story is continued, it begins with Joseph at the age of 17, the same age at which we first meet him by the well. Even the reader who knows that a whole volume intervenes between the introduction of Joseph and this continuation of his story will sense the fact that these introductory chapters are more an introduction to the story of Joseph than to that of Jacob. The themes introduced in these early chapters point more to Joseph's future than to Jacob's past and those themes of the *Vorspiel* which are not of a general theological or mythological nature all point to the Joseph story. The predominant themes of Part I are the well motif and Joseph's attitude toward myth and religion. Even the important Jacob

themes, moreover, are all related to Joseph. Jacob's timidity, for example, is an illustration of the death and resurrection myth. Further, the abandon of the man of feeling is spoken of as Joseph's heritage from his father (IV, 84); and Jacob's relation to Esau is a mythical pattern which is repeated in Joseph's strife with his brothers.

"Habent sua fata libelli." With these words Thomas Mann in 1948 commented on a characteristic of his *Joseph und seine Brüder* which he had earlier noted with respect to *Buddenbrooks* and *Der Zauberberg*. All of these works had grown from fairly modest projects into multivolumed novels. Even after it became apparent that the stories from the Bible would grow into a novel, its size was not immediately apparent to the author, for in his essay of 1948, the introduction to the American one-volume edition of *Joseph and his Brothers*, Mann speaks of a story

die, solange die Vorstellung irgend haltbar blieb, als fortlaufend einheitliche Erzählung, als ein Band, ein nur eben leider stark anschwellendes Buch gedacht war . . . (XI, 671-72).¹¹

From this we are led to believe that the novel grew beyond Mann's original intentions in the course of his writing it. Consider again his characterization in 1928 of the story as proceeding "erinnerungsweise, sprunghaft-assoziationsmäßig." Ironically, it would seem that this formula describes not only the finished story but also the way it came to have its present form, for while Mann was allowing himself to be led by his own associations and those of Jacob, his story not only grew in size but also changed in character. The novel which began as an introduction to the Joseph story gradually shifted its focus from Joseph to Jacob.¹²

Part II of the novel marks a transition from the introduction to the Joseph story to the beginning of the Jacob story. It begins with the much-discussed ambiguous identity of Eliezer, and its opening chapter, "Mondgrammatik," ends with the narrator's statement that in those days the distinction of spirit and individual spirit was not so strong as it is now. Yet this theme is developed largely around the figure of Jacob and leads to the more specific theme of Jacob's timidity.

The second chapter of Part II continues the theme of loss of identity in mythical consciousness. It deals with the roles inherited from the past which Jacob plays, and there follows a discussion of Abraham and Abraham's God, then of God's people, with whom the name Israel is associated. With this name, the name given to Jacob himself by the angel with whom he wrestled and which, ironically, means "God fighteth," we are back at the theme of Jacob's timidity. This theme introduces the next chapter, entitled "Eliphas":

Für Leute wie Schimeon und Levi, die starken Lea-Söhne, möchte es ein Grund zu heimlichen Lächeln sein, daß der Vater just diesen kühnen und räuberischen

Namen sich errungen, ihn sich gleichsam vom Himmel gerissen hatte. Denn Jaakob war nicht kriegerisch (IV, 132).

The theme of escape from outworn mythical roles is sounded in this chapter as we see Esau escaping from the fratricidal Cain role, but this and the two following chapters have as their principal purpose the illustration of Israel's ironically unwarlike nature and of the blessing which accompanied his humiliations.

We are dealing here with the first important flashback of the novel. In explaining the nature of Jacob's timidity, Mann has shifted the scene back in time 37 years to the time of Jacob's flight from Esau. This theme is amply illustrated in the chapter "Eliphas" where we see Jacob grovelling before the figure of Esau's youthful son, and in the following chapter we see how God lifted up Jacob's head after this humiliation. There then follows a jump forward in time of 25 years in the final chapter of Part II. This chapter plays on the same theme, discussing the lifting up by God occurring before a much less embarrassing scene, when Jacob wrestled with the angel and received the name Israel before his encounter with Esau.

Part II retains much of the introductory character of Part I inasmuch as it still shows a high proportion of speculative matter while the story progresses very little. But it is also important to note that it is less discursive than Part I since its thematic material is more specifically directed. The theme of playing mythical roles is a general theme which is important for the Joseph story, but the whole of Part II clearly has the purpose of illustrating this theme in the life of Jacob. The novel is here changing character from being an introduction to the Joseph story to being the beginning of the Jacob story.

Yet even when the Jacob story begins, it still gives the impression of having a very definite and limited purpose: to illustrate the theme of playing mythological roles and, specifically, the way Jacob played such roles. Even more specifically, the story told in the last three chapters of Part II serves to illustrate Jacob's timidity and the spiritual resources which allowed him to triumph over humiliation. Jacob has become the center of attention, but it is not yet certain that he will maintain this central position. The telling of the flight and the meeting with Esau have the purpose of explaining a trait of Jacob's character but the quick return to the present after telling of these matters might even lead us to suspect that it is the 67-year-old Jacob who is thus becoming a central figure in the novel. It is not until Part III that the transition is complete and we see that Mann has the intention of telling the story of Jacob's whole earlier life.

The continued preponderance of speculative matter and the limited scope of the story in Part II are noteworthy in their contrast to what follows. At the beginning of Part III of the novel, entitled "Die Geschichte Dinas," the narrator makes this statement:

Da er damals nach Sichem kam, ist hier der Ort, die Geschichten und schweren Wirren dieses Aufenthaltes darzulegen Wenn wir das schlimme und schließlich blutige Geschehen von damals entwickeln, das eingeschrieben war in Jaakob's müde und züchtige Greisenmiene . . . so ist es in Verfolg und Zusammenhang unserer Betrachtung seines Seelengepräges, und weil nichts besser als sein Verhalten dabei zu erläutern geeignet ist, warum Schimeon und Levi einander heimlich in die Seiten stießen, wenn der Vater von seinem Ehrennamen und Gottestitel Gebrauch machte (IV, 152).

As an introduction to the Dinah episode, these words are rather misleading since they imply that what is to follow is a further illustration of the theme of Jacob's timidity. The ostensible purpose of the story is thus to illustrate a trait which had already been illustrated convincingly in the chapters dealing with Jacob's flight and his later meeting with Esau. Part III of the novel is, however, more than just a further illustration of one of Jacob's traits. It is here that the Jacob story really begins to be told and the connection with what immediately precedes is revealed in the narrator's statement that the Dinah episode should properly follow since the events follow chronologically those of the last chapter. Considering the jumps back and forward in time in preceding chapters, we might have expected such jumps to continue. But Mann has here disclosed the fact that he is settling down to a more orderly kind of storytelling. The story to be told, moreover, is part of Jacob's story rather than of Joseph's.

"Die Geschichte Dinas" is more storylike than anything which preceded, including the transitional chapters at the end of Part II. Events occurring over a period of several years are told in chronological order. We are introduced to a larger cast of characters who give the story background and help to raise it above the level of a mere episode. And the story is able to move more freely when at last the long speculations by the narrator, which gave the earlier parts of the novel their introductory character, become shorter and far less frequent. The introduction has been completed and Mann has finally committed himself to telling the story of Jacob on a far larger scale than he originally intended.

It has been pointed out above that the *Vorspiel* and Part I of *Die Geschichten Jaakob's* form an introduction and that the nature of the themes they introduced suggest that it was an introduction to the Joseph story rather than to that of Jacob. Thomas Mann's introduction to the American one-volume edition of the tetralogy provides the possibility of interpreting these early chapters as coming from a time when he had not planned to write of Jacob's whole life at all. The following statement in his 1942 address at the Library of Congress on the Joseph novels provides further information on the birth of the first of the four novels:

Das Vorspiel war vierundsechzig Seiten lang—das hätte mich bedenklich stimmen können wegen die Proportionen des Ganzen und tat es wohl auch,

besonders da ich mich entschieden hatte, daß es mit der persönlichen Geschichte Josephs nicht getan sei, sondern daß die Vor- und Urgeschichte, die Geschichte der Väter bis zurück zu Abraham und weiter zurück zu den Anfängen der Welt, wenigstens in der Perspektive, mit aufgenommen zu werden verlangte (XI, 659).

Two important facts are revealed here. Mann did not intend to write a long novel even when he was already writing the *Vorspiel*. And when he had finished this long prelude it was apparently still his intention to write of Joseph's predecessors only "in perspective." This intention is reflected in the finished novel. Part I deals with Joseph and Jacob in the "present," that is, when Jacob is 67 and Joseph 17, and there are indeed reflections on the mythical past which show the past in perspective. Part II marks a transition from showing the past in perspective to its presentation as the novel's present time. This occurs, of course, when the first major flashback is made and we are taken back to the time of Jacob's flight from Esau. Yet the brevity of this first excursion into the past still justifies the characterization of the events described as being seen in perspective. The transitions from introduction to the Joseph story to the telling of the Jacob story and from the discussion of Jacob's past in perspective to the telling of his story in the present are both complete in Part III where the narrative begins to move in chronological order. The following jump back in time, to the stealing of the blessing, is the final such jump. Thereafter the chronological principle established in Part III is followed to the end of the novel.

It would seem then that there is a rather simple explanation of the order of events in *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*. Mann's own statements indicate that the novel grew, even in the course of his writing it, beyond his original intentions. The sequence of the various episodes of the novel arose from his decisions to tell of earlier events after he had already begun with events occurring much later. Thus the order in which Mann conceived the necessity of the various episodes from Jacob's life appearing in the novel at all is just the order in which they appear in the finished work.

It was remarked earlier that there has been little critical comment on the chronological structure of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*. Such commentary as there has been must now be considered, since it suggests alternatives to the above conclusions.

A dissertation by Rolf Schörken, published in part in 1957, contains the most extensive discussion to date of the chronological problem in the Jacob novel. Working from the idea of "*Zeitmorphologie*" of the Günther Müller school of morphological criticism, Schörken develops the supplementary idea of a "*Personenmorphologie*" and claims that in the case of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* this approach through character development explains the chronological irregularity. He maintains that the time scheme of the novel is nothing more than a device used to portray the character of Jacob.¹³

Schörken's study is illuminating in many respects, for there is no doubt that Jacob's character is described within the various excursions into the past. But this emphasis on "*Personengestaltung*" seems to have been carried too far, especially in the absence of any demonstration that Jacob's character could not have been described within a normal chronological structure or that Mann was in any way preoccupied with the formal problem of character development.

Schörken deals at some length with the figure of "der sinnende Jaakob" as the center of all the flashbacks of Parts II and III but he might well have considered also another prominent figure in the novel, the reflecting narrator. A key to understanding the chronological structure of the novel both in its *Entstehungsgeschichte* and as the form of the finished work lies in the words of Mann's statement in 1928 which was quoted above: "erinnerungsweise," referring to Jacob, and "assoziationsmäßig," suggesting the associations of both Jacob and the narrator.

In his discussion of the problem, Ferdinand Lion¹⁴ speaks first of the stories of Jacob arising in Jacob's memory in the arbitrary way that events occur in a dream without regard for chronological order. Lion is thus on the verge of the theory that the chronology of the novel is given order by Jacob. He abandons this approach, however, and proceeds to assert that the chronological confusion of the novel reminds the reader of the Bible. He implies that it is not so much comparable to the Bible itself but rather is like the tradition of the Bible's stories, for if these legends were arranged in the order of their historical origin, there would be a jumping back and forth in time similar to that of the novel. Both these approaches touched on by Lion are potentially fruitful and it is disappointing that he did not pursue them further.

A more important interpretation is that of Paul Altenberg, who observes that the novel gives the impression of improvisation and that herein lies the explanation for the seemingly arbitrary order of the Jacob stories. Although he makes no attempt to prove that the chronological structure of the novel was not a deliberate plan of Mann's, Altenberg comes to the very heart of the question when he refers to the reflecting Jacob and the dreamy reflections of the narrator in discussing the order of events.¹⁵

With the word "improvisation" Altenberg approaches the same uniting of *Entstehungsgeschichte* and the associative movement of the narrative which I have maintained is the best approach to the chronological problem. If I have stressed the negative aspect of improvisation, which is the absence in the beginning of a plan for the finished work, it has been in order to discourage any attempt to find an elaborate order behind the novel's chronology. The chronological disorder cannot be argued away although, as will soon be seen, this disorder is not without its artistic effect.

In her article on the problems of time in the work of Thomas Mann, Genevieve Bianquis says that the chronological disorder of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* serves to give the impression that time does not flow in one direction only but is like the sea with its currents and tides.¹⁶ This is somewhat misleading since there is no question in the novel of time itself moving in any but a forward direction. If we take her statement as an interpretation of the way time is experienced, however, her statement is suggestive although still inconclusive. For if the characters of Mann's novel experience time in an unusual way, the reasons for this must be determined.

In order to clarify the way time is experienced by the characters of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* it is necessary first to look briefly at two of Mann's earlier works. The significance of vagueness about time in Mann's fictional characters can easily be seen by examining the journeys which introduce *Der Tod in Venedig*, *Der Zauberberg* and the Joseph novels.

In *Der Tod in Venedig*, when Gustav Aschenbach was finally on the boat going to Venice, he experienced a strange confusion of both time and space:

Aber im leeren, im ungegliederten Raume fehlt unserem Sinn auch das Maß der Zeit, und wir dämmern im Ungemessenen (VIII, 461).

And immediately after this statement we read that Aschenbach goes to sleep thinking of all the grotesque characters and experiences to which he cannot quite attach meanings but which, as the reader realizes, signal his departure from the everyday world and entry into the world of myth. A good illustration of timelessness in the mythical world is the quotation from the *Odyssey* in the fourth chapter:

Dann schien es ihm Wohl, als sei er entrückt ins elysische Land, an die Grenzen der Erde, wo leichtestes Leben den Menschen beschert ist, wo nicht Schnee ist und Winter, noch Sturm und strömender Regen, sondern immer sanft kühlenden Anhauch Okeanos aufsteigen läßt, und in seliger Muße die Tage verrinnen, mühelos, kampflös und ganz nur der Sonne und ihren Festen geweiht (VIII, 488).¹⁷

Significantly, when Aschenbach almost leaves Venice (VIII, 481-84), his planned departure is surrounded with a petty concern over getting to places on time, a concern with actual chronological time which contrasts with the former relaxed and timeless atmosphere. Another example of a return from the world of myth to the world of chronological time can be seen in Aschenbach's worrying about lack of time to finish his literary work after the scene in Munich where he sees the first of the mythical death figures (VIII, 448). After the later scene with the Venetian musician, also a death figure, there is a similar reminder of the world of chronological time when Aschenbach reflects on the hourglass (VIII, 511). Concern about the passing of time is a reminder of the real world which always exists alongside the mythical.

The mythical element in *Der Zauberberg* is not, of course, so predominant as in *Der Tod in Venedig* but there can be no doubt that it is present.¹⁸ Here, too, it is clear that loss of the sense of chronological time and a shift to a mythical world are related. A reflection on time and space during a journey, reminiscent of *Der Tod in Venedig*, is found in the opening pages of the novel:

Zwei Reisetage entfernen den Menschen . . . seiner Alltagswelt Der Raum, der sich drehend und fliehend zwischen ihn und seine Pflanzstätte wälzt, bewährt Kräfte, die man gewöhnlich der Zeit vorbehalten Gleich ihr erzeugt er Vergessen, er tut es aber, indem er die Person des Menschen aus ihren Beziehungen löst und ihn in einen freien und ursprünglichen Zustand versetzt Zeit, sagt man, ist Lethe; aber auch Fernluft ist so ein Trank . . . (III, 12).

This bit of speculation on one of time's qualities is connected with the transition from a familiar world to a magic mountain.

Hans Castorp's destination is a place where he will find time problematical. The vague sense of chronological time of the Berghof patients, and eventually of Hans Castorp himself, is one of the important motifs in the novel. When Hans Castorp decides to stay on the mountain, that is, in a timeless world, the event is marked by the first whole section of the novel that deals with time, "Exkurs über den Zeitsinn." Castorp is conscious of the fact that time is experienced at the Berghof in a vague way, and this leads him to speculation about time. The nature of such speculations is not so important as the simple fact that he does find time to be a vague thing which can excite speculation. This vagueness of time is reminiscent of the mythical world into which Aschenbach was introduced.¹⁹

Gustav Aschenbach and Hans Castorp made journeys which took them out of the ordinary world and into the mythical world. Joseph and Jacob are, however, already in the world of myth. Appropriately, then, the journey which forms the prelude to the Joseph novels is not theirs but the narrator's who invites the reader along for an imaginary journey into the past. The whole prelude dwells on the theme that the world of myth is a timeless world in which distinctions of chronological time are blurred. To those familiar with the journeys of Aschenbach and Castorp it should be no surprise that when this third journey reaches its destination we are once more in a world whose inhabitants have a vague sense of time, Mann's sign that they are in a mythical world.

The connection of myth and timelessness is made explicit in the novel and there is therefore no need to cite further examples.²⁰ It should be recalled, however, that the associative movement of the narrative in the *Vorspiel* and Part I gives the reader an impression that chronology is somehow not important. This impression is strengthened by the mythical atmosphere of the novel, in which Joseph can think of Abraham as being his

great-grandfather and in which Joseph's tutor Eliezer can speak of Abraham's servant as "I." In such an atmosphere Thomas Mann could allow himself even greater liberties with chronology.

It is now possible to provide the answer to the central question raised by this study. Why, it must be asked, did Mann not rewrite or rearrange the beginning of the novel when it began to develop into a novel about Jacob rather than Joseph? A partial answer to this question is the superficial one, that Mann had a reluctance to change anything once he had written it down. He said on more than one occasion that the first manuscript was always intended to be the one that went to the printer.²¹ A deeper reason for leaving the confused chronology of the novel unchanged was, however, hinted at above when it was suggested that the movement of the narrative by association prepared the reader for the lengthy excursions back in time. The free movement through time in the *Vorspiel* established a mood of timelessness into which the flashbacks easily fit, and this mood continued when Jacob's memories showed the same disregard for chronology as did the narrator's associations. We have just seen, moreover, that vagueness about time has a special significance for Mann. The chronological disorder could remain since it contributed to the mood of timelessness which he used in *Der Tod in Venedig*, *Der Zauberberg*, and from the outset in the Joseph novels to characterize a world of myth. The use of flashbacks, the necessity of which was the incidental result of Mann's changing conception of the story's scope during the time he was writing it, was completely in keeping with the timeless atmosphere of the mythical world in which *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* is set.

When Mann introduced a vagueness about time into his works it was for an important but rather simple reason: to characterize such a world of myth. The speculations about time of his fictional characters, of his critics, and of Thomas Mann himself should not be allowed to obscure this fact. In a letter to Erich Kahler in 1952²² Mann seems on the verge of misleading himself and, perhaps, Kahler about the novel. There he used the words *merkwürdigste* and *neuartigste* to describe *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* and single it out for special distinction among his other works. The unusual chronological scheme seems to be the only possible justification for such an evaluation, yet if this is what he had in mind, both of these words are still of questionable appropriateness. The use of the flashbacks was new only for Thomas Mann and has nothing in common with modern experiments with time in the novel. Furthermore, this study has, I hope, shown that the artistic justification for the flashbacks lies in their accord with a device which he himself used as early as *Der Tod in Venedig*.

NOTES

1. The major divisions of the novel (*Hauptstücke*) will be referred to in English as "parts," and the smaller divisions within the *Hauptstücke* as "chapters."
2. The narrator's freedom to tell parts of a story out of their normal order goes back as far as the Homeric epic. See, for example, Robert Petsch, *Wesen und Formen der Erzählkunst* (2. Aufl.; Halle, 1942), pp. 170-72. Wolfgang Kayser also cites the *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus as another ancient example. See *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk* (8. Aufl.; München, 1962), p. 210.
3. Thomas Mann intended originally to tell the story even here in chronological order. For knowledge of this fact I am indebted to Professor Herbert Lehnert who has examined the early manuscript of *Der Zauberberg* in the Angell Collection at Yale University. There the first two chapters of the work appear in the reverse order of their appearance in the published novel.
4. Eberhard Lämmert has made the most exhaustive study to date of the uses of departures from chronology which, however, he discusses only as elements of a complex plot having some principle of order other than chronology or as purposeful digressions from a simple plot which itself proceeds chronologically. See his *Bauformen des Erzählens* (Stuttgart, 1955), pp. 44-58, and pp. 95-139. Petsch, in discussing the Homeric epic (*op. cit.*, p. 172), also asserts that departures from chronological order indicate not disorder but merely order other than the chronological.
5. Rolf Schörken, *Morphologie der Personen in Thomas Manns Roman "Joseph und seine Brüder"* (Bonn, 1957). The original dissertation dealt with the entire Joseph tetralogy but only the introduction and the study of *Die Geschichten Jaakob's* have appeared in published form.
6. Ferdinand Lion, *Thomas Mann, Leben und Werk* (Zürich, 1947), pp. 123-24.
7. Genevieve Bianquis, "Le temps dans l'oeuvre de Thomas Mann," *Journal de Psychologie*, XLIV (1951), 356-370.
8. Paul Altenberg, *Die Romane Thomas Manns, Versuch einer Deutung* (Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, 1961). See especially pp. 116-20.
9. This and subsequent references to Thomas Mann's works are to the edition *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden* ([Frankfurt/Main] 1960). References in parentheses are to volume and page number in this edition.
10. See Wolfgang Kayser, *Entstehung und Krise des modernen Romans* (2. Aufl.; Stuttgart, 1955), p. 17, where he points out that the narrator of a novel is not to be identified with, for example, Thomas Mann personally, but is rather a fictional character in the novel itself. This distinction is useful here since it forestalls any attempt to call the *Vorspiel* an introduction by Mann to his own novel. The introduction is, in fact, part of the work of fiction and it can therefore be said that from the outset the novel proceeds where the associations of its characters lead, without regard to chronology.
11. Mann's original plan is stated specifically in his "Lebensabriß" (XI, 138). What became the four Joseph novels was intended to be one of three novellas in a triptych on religious themes from history.
12. In his "Lebensabriß" (XI, 138) Mann himself says that Jacob assumed such a dominating role that the novel might better be called *Jaakob und seine Söhne* rather than *Joseph und seine Brüder*. This statement would be far more enlightening had it not begun "Ich hatte kaum . . . zu schreiben begonnen, als auch schon die räumlichen Selbstständigkeitsansprüche der Erzählung nicht länger zu verbergen waren." It may be true that Mann foresaw a larger work soon after he started

writing the *Vorspiel*. The domination of the novel by Jacob, however, was certainly not foreseen until Mann was deep into Part I of the novel proper, that is, until Jacob had already been introduced as an old man and a number of themes pointing to Joseph's future had already been introduced.

13. See Schörken, *op. cit.*, p. 76, where these conclusions are summarized.
14. Lion, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-24. There is a possibility that Lion's interpretation may have received some approval from Thomas Mann himself since he was personally acquainted with Mann.
15. Altenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-19.
16. Bianquis, *op. cit.*, p. 367.
17. The quotation and its source were first noticed by F. H. Mautner. See his "Die griechischen Anklänge in Thomas Manns 'Tod in Venedig,'" *Monatshefte*, XLIV (1952), 22.
18. For a discussion of myth in *Der Tod in Venedig* see André von Gronicka, "'Myth plus psychology,' a style analysis of *Death in Venice*," *Germanic Review*, XXXI (1956), 191-205. The most important attempt at defining the role of myth in *Der Zauberberg* is Helmut Koopmann, "Die Kategorie des Hermetischen in Thomas Manns Roman 'Der Zauberberg,'" *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, LXXX (1961), 404-22.
19. Mann's statements that *Der Zauberberg* was originally intended as a companion piece to follow *Der Tod in Venedig* (XI, 125, 606) suggest that this similarity of the two works is not accidental.
20. See Käte Hamburger, *Thomas Manns Roman "Joseph und seine Brüder"* (Stockholm, 1945), pp. 45-49, where the connection of myth and timelessness in the Joseph novels is discussed.
21. Examples are the essays "Meine Arbeitsweise" and "[Zur Physiologie des dichterischen Schaffens]," XI, 746 and 779.
22. For knowledge of this letter, which has not yet been published, I am indebted to Professor Lehnert.